

DPI VISTA Monthly

November 2009

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

-Nelson Mandela

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Lessons for VISTA and Life

by Betsy Prueter

I have kept an article from *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* (my hometown paper!) entitled "Life Lessons" for three years now. I read it every now and again to remind myself of some of what it takes to be a successful partnership builder and community organizer!

As I read through it again last week, I was struck by how many of these lessons are relevant to VISTA work. I found these seven in particular to be inspiring in their simplicity and their message.

1. When in doubt, just take the next small step.

Your roles as VISTAs can probably seem overwhelming at times. You may have a lot of questions about what you're doing, where your projects are heading, or



what your end results may be. But it's important to take things one step at a time (even if it's small one). We need to keep pushing so that our small steps will turn into big steps.

2. You don't have to win every argument. Agree to disagree.

VISTAs work with a lot of different people with their own personalities and their own perspectives. Pick your battles and seek out collaboration, even with individuals with whom you disagree. Just because you don't agree doesn't mean you can't work together!

3. Don't compare your life to others. You have no idea what their journey is all about.

I might rephrase this to say: "don't compare your VISTA experiences to other VISTAs." Share your experiences, yes. Learn from each other's experiences, absolutely. But know that you are all in unique situations with unique roles. You are all making valuable contributions, but each in a different way!

4. Don't audit life. Show up and make the most of it now.

Carpe diem! Seize the day! VISTA is about action. It's about engagement. It's about involvement. So take the initiative and make the most of this year. It will be of tremendous value to you in years to come.

5. No matter how you feel, get up, dress up, and show up.

Some mornings it's extra hard to get out of bed. It seems like a perfect day to hit snooze....again. You're tired. You're frustrated. You've got a million other things to do. But we made a commitment. To our sites, to our supervisors, to our communities, and really, to ourselves.

6. Take a deep breath. It calms the mind.

If our frustrations look like they might get the best of us, step back. If you're being pulled in too many directions, take a moment to close your eyes and breathe. If an event you planned didn't go as planned. If an Action Team meeting seemed unproductive. Take a deep breath. We're all going to face our fair share of challenges and obstacles. But let's learn from these obstacles, regroup, recharge, and get right back to work!

7. If you don't ask, you don't get.

As VISTAs, you should be pushing boundaries. Asking hard questions. And if there's something that doesn't make sense to you, you need to ask why. If you think you have a solution or a suggestion, you need to express it. Because if you don't, the moment will pass.

Save the Dates!



November 2: DPI
Regional meeting,
Wausau

November 10: DPI
Regional meeting,
Johnson Creek

November 13-15, Youth
as Partners in Civic
Leadership Conference

November 17, DPI
Regional meeting, Rice
Lake

November 17, Poverty
Simulation at U.S.
Grant Elementary
School

**Six Types Produce
Specific Results for
Students**

By Ruth Anne Landsverk

Ideally, schools will design and implement a One-Year Action Plan in which all Six Types of Involvement work together to achieve specific school goals. Sometimes, however, it's helpful to know what results for students each of the Six Types of Involvement is apt to promote.

Studies show that each type of involvement promotes different kinds of results. Your Partnership Action Team may want to design activities around one or more of the Types, depending on what results for students (or school improvement goals) it wants to achieve. For example, schools seeking to increase student attendance may want to take a close look at Type 1: Parenting. Research shows that schools can especially boost attendance numbers when they make plans to inform and involve parents about school policies and expectations for students to be at school on time every day. Conversely, schools wanting more students to complete and hand in homework assignments as part of an effort to increase student achievement may want to design more activities around Type 4: Learning at Home. How does the school let parents know what expectations are for students to do their homework? How can parents find out what the child's daily homework is, when long-term projects are due, and how homework is graded?

Following, are the results for students that research shows each Type promotes, as well as a few examples of partnership activities that YOU, the DPI VISTAs, are helping to organize and carry out. As you read through them, ask yourself: what results for students does my Action Team hope to achieve? Do our practices link to targeted results or do we need to look more closely at one Type of Involvement to achieve those results?

Parenting Results: **Students improve attendance** when parents understand school policies and are involved in meeting attendance goals.

Sylvia Sedrak at A.C. Kiefer Educational Center, Wausau, helped organized Pre-Kindergarten Questions and Answers Night that included information for families about school policies and programs.

Communicating Results: **Students increase awareness of their own academic progress** in

subjects and skills with good two-way communications on classwork.



Angela Rumsey at Hi-Mount Community School, Milwaukee, assembled a “welcome packet” for parents including information about the Milwaukee Public School Parent Assistant online system, upcoming parent workshops, a Quick Guide to Community Resources, and her VISTA position.

Volunteering Results: **Students gain academic skills** that are tutored or taught by volunteers.

Anna Morgen in the Rhinelander School District helped conduct an orientation for new volunteers to ensure that they received the training and support necessary to provide excellent academic assistance to select students.

Learning at Home Results: **Students complete more homework** in specific subjects.

Sara Hubin of Lakeland Family Resource Center in Spooner is helping to plan a parent workshop on improving student study skills.

Decision Making Results: Because parent leaders are included in school decisions, **students benefit from policies and projects** conducted and supported by parent organizations.

Erica Spurgeon, Green Bay School District and UW-GB, partnered with the Franklin Parent Network on ways to bring more parents into the schools, both as volunteers and as members of the Action Team and parent group.

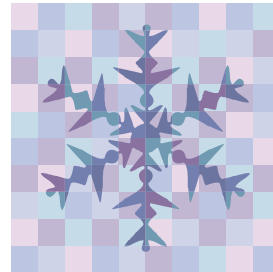
Collaborating with the Community Results: **Students gain skills and talents** in curricular and extracurricular projects with community partners.

Sarah Glassman at Maple Tree Elementary, Milwaukee, is expanding the school's partnership with Growing Power, a national nonprofit organization that helps people grow, process, market and distribute food in a sustainable manner. Growing Power is represented on her Action Team and the school may become a pick-up site for the baskets of produce they sell.

Partnership efforts have beneficial results for families, students, teachers, and administrators. See a complete list of results by Type on pp. 153-158 in your ***School, Family, and Community Partnerships Handbook for Action***. Also, it may be helpful to review the Spring 2009 **Type 2** newsletter article, ***Focus Partnerships on Results for Students***, at <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/type2/issue26/researchbrief-26.htm>.

Cheap and Healthy Cold Weather Activities

By Casey Gauthier



Winter is fast approaching and it's likely that some of you are not thrilled at the prospect of many months of snow and cold. Knowing that many people find it hard to stay active during the winter, I did some research and came across "The Top 5 Winter Activities that Keep You Healthy and Active" on Suite101.com.

1. Downhill Skiing and Snowboarding

This is a sport with beautiful winter views and excitement. It is not the most rewarding sport when it comes to calorie burning, unless you are racing. On the upside if you are not the best skier getting to the ski lift and lugging the equipment around has got to count for something.

2. Leisure Skating

Both skating and skiing burn about 500 calories an hour for a 155 pound person according to NutriStrategy. However, the prospect for burning more calories and increasing heart rate are greater with skating than with skiing. There are many free outdoor skating rinks in most cities and skates can be bought for under \$100, making leisure skating a great and affordable way to stay fit during the winter months.

3. Ice Hockey

Getting together with friends to play a game of hockey will not only get you outside but, will help battle the winter blues with some much needed social interaction. However, the beers after the game will definitely offset that calorie burning you did on the ice so be careful!

4. Snowshoeing

Snowshoeing has come a long way from rawhide and wooden snowshoes. Many resorts offer snowshoeing, along with the more popular cross-country and downhill skiing to its patrons. Snowshoes are now made of synthetic materials and come in various sizes for different uses ranging from running to mountaineering. A modern twist on a classic mode of transportation makes snowshoeing an interesting and fun winter activity.

5. Cross-Country Skiing

The perfect mix of maximum cardiovascular exercise and great views of the winter wonderland outside can only be found in one winter activity: cross-country skiing. For all those hard-core runners, cross-country is the perfect winter alternative, and just like running, speed and incline determines how many calories you will burn. It's not as exhilarating as down hill skiing, but the opportunity to see some winter wildlife and cross-country's peaceful manner makes it a very different and rewarding experience.

If none of these suit your fancy, don't forget about snowball fights, snow angels, snowmen, or even shoveling

the sidewalk for an elderly neighbor, which can burn over 400 calories an hour. At that rate, you can reward yourself with some hot cocoa when you're done!

Jane answers Josh's questions

Jane Parker is serving at the Shiocton Public Library.



Josh: Where did you grow up and how does it compare to your life now?

Jane: I grew up in Menasha, graduated from Menasha High and then left town. I spent time in the Army Reserve training to be a medic, then went to college for nursing at Marian College in Fond du Lac. Most of my high school free time was spent in Wild Rose, where my parents built a cottage on Little Silver Lake. My two brothers and I helped with the building, played in the water and did a lot of fishing. Once in a while I stayed in Menasha for football games, but I recall my best times in Wild Rose. That brings me to where I am now: Shiocton, which is a small town with the Wolf River and a lot wild life, farm land and open land. I

lived in Appleton after graduating from nursing school, but never really did like the city. Five years ago, I sold my house in Appleton and searched for a great school system for my kids. Shiocton was the place. It has a great school district, is a small town with friendly people and is safe for my kids.

Josh: Who has been the biggest influence on your life? What lessons did they teach you?

Jane: The biggest influence in my life was both of my parents. My father was very detail-oriented, organized, and knew a lot about many things and was never afraid to try doing, trying, or fixing anything. I follow in my father's footsteps in all of those ways. My mother was very gentle, understanding, calm, and was always available when I needed her for anything. I follow in my mother's footsteps in all of those ways also. The lessons they both taught me are priceless. Of course, I have made mistakes along the way, but all the lessons they taught me or showed me have always been the foundation of what I do or who I am.

Josh: How has your life been different than what you'd imagined?

Jane: Years ago, in seventh grade, we had an assignment to write a letter to ourselves reflecting on what we want for our life. When I opened it ten years later, many of the things were the same as I had imagined. I wanted to live in a small town, with two to four children, have a garden, and possibly a horse. Well, I live in a small town, have two girls, have a large garden, but no horse. I always enjoyed the simple things in life and I think my life is great right now.

Josh: Do you have any favorite stories about your kids?

Jane: Sarah, my twelve year old has always had a huge heart. My favorite story about her is on one Christmas together she made all kinds of homemade cards, art projects, and "special created stuff" for me. It was all individually wrapped and I had to open it one at a time. There is nothing more special than getting gifts "from the heart" from your children. Cynthia, my almost eight year old, has a heart of gold also, but she has a humorous side to her. My favorite story about her is on her sixth birthday she got all dressed up in Hannah Montana garb (wig and all!) and had to do all these little performances for me. She has her own little way of singing and dancing and moving that will remain as

a permanent image in my head forever.



Josh: What was the hardest thing you ever did?

Jane: The hardest thing I ever did was in January 1991. I was in the Army Reserves and was called up to serve in Desert Storm. The whole experience was one I will never forget, but the absolute hardest thing was being told to pack one duffel bag of personal stuff to take with me and then getting on the bus from the Army Reserve center and saying goodbye to my family, not knowing what was going to happen.

Josh: How do you know we aren't all just brains in a vat, experiencing the world only through electro-chemical inputs? How do you know I exist? How do you know you exist?

Jane: Wow, that is a deep question

for me! I am a practicing Christian and the only good answer that I can come up with is that God created me, you, and the world around us.

Josh: What do you do to relax?

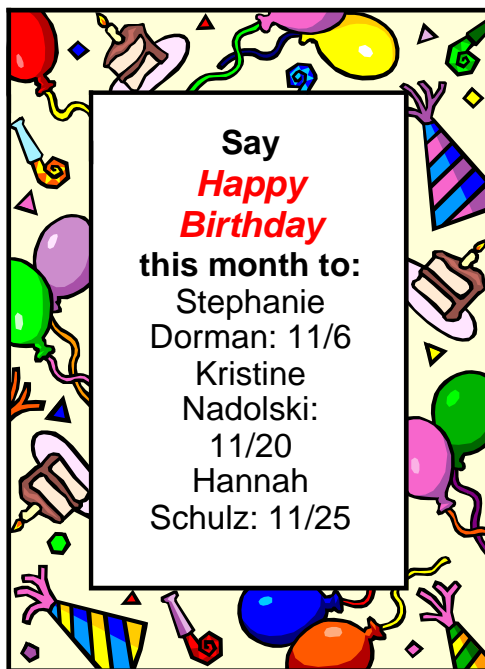
Jane: I like to go for walks, ride on my boyfriend's Harley and spend time outdoors. Outdoor activities include gardening, camping, fishing, bow hunting and walking in the woods.

Josh: What are you most looking forward to in your year as a VISTA?

Jane: I want to be able to know that I helped some child grow or some person reach one of their goals. I want to know that I made a difference.

Josh: What most fascinates you in the world?

Jane: I love to travel. Anywhere in the world is fine with me.



Josh answers Jane's questions

Josh Cowles is serving at the Fond du Lac Public Library.



Jane: What is your favorite childhood memory about the town you grew up in?

Josh: I grew up in Fond du Lac. I think that my favorite memory was going with my Dad to the International Aerobatics Club air show, which was scheduled to coincide with the EAA event in Oshkosh every year. I got an autograph from a Russian pilot, even though the novelty of having a Russian pilot there was lost on me.

Jane: If you were to win a lottery of one million dollars, what would you do with it?

Josh: I would pay off all of my debt, buy a modest house and two modest cars with cash, and put the rest in an interest-bearing account or some bonds. I could use the interest to make annual charitable contributions to Wisconsin Public Radio, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Heifer Intl. and others; hopefully I

would still have enough left to put my future children through college. Other than that, I would proceed as normal.

Jane: Where is the most beautiful place you have ever traveled to?

Josh: The Sylvania Wilderness Area in Michigan's UP. The Badlands of South Dakota are a close second.



Jane: What is the most important personality characteristic you have inherited from one of your parents and why?

Josh: I inherited calmness from my dad. To me, this means I don't get too worked up about things without a very good reason, and I try not to speak before I think. It is the most important because many people see it as the defining feature of my identity and it is one of the strongest characteristics we shared in common. People think I'm laid-back but it is more than that.

Jane: What do you feel is the biggest challenge ahead of you this year as a VISTA in the Fond du Lac Public Library?

Josh: The biggest challenge I can fully grasp right now is recruiting enough volunteers to open our lab to job seekers. I suspect that, ultimately, the biggest challenge may be sustainability, which is partially out of our hands. My biggest personal challenge will be to get

used to being outside my comfort zone.

Jane: If you could have any career, job, or position anywhere, what would it be?

Josh: If I could do anything without concern for income, I would be a roving oral historian and travel the world collecting stories and sharing them. Failing that, I would settle for working my way up into administration at a university library.

Jane: What type of recreational activity would you choose if you were given the choices of deep sea fishing, going to an opera, or playing poker into the early morning hours?

Josh: They all have a certain appeal. I would love to go boating, but not fishing. I would love to see a play or a concert, but probably not an opera. I used to play penny poker with relatives late into the evening at Christmas gatherings, but I've mostly lost my taste for the game now. Of the three options, I would say poker is most likely but none of the above would be better.

Jane: What is the most daring thing you have ever done?

Josh: Most of the daring things I have done I'm not very proud of. These are stories best told over beers with a clear sense of shame, not published in a VISTA newsletter. I have never saved anybody, defused a bomb, or stood up to a tyrant. Sadly, my daring has been wasted on petty teenage mischief, but I'm saving some up for the right moment.

It's November and You're Thinking about Grad School

By Penny Bruskin

Taking time after undergrad to serve as a VISTA was a pretty easy decision. As a college graduate, I knew I would no longer be insured. I also tried applying to a few jobs around the country through idealist.org, which all fell through in our time of [insert sarcasm here] great economic boom. I had an idea that I wanted to go back to school, but I really didn't know how my interdisciplinary interests could translate into a degree that furthered my career options or translated into a profession. After four years of theory, analytical papers that were flushed out in idealism, and peers with whom I largely agreed on most issues, I wanted a meaningful and practical way to further my interests in anti-oppression work, poverty and education. Without much haste I made Americorps.gov my new best friend, and voila- I'm back in Madison working on this amazing project. Ok, great. So now I'm in my second year with VISTA. Is it time to go to graduate school yet? If so, what options do I have?

As I learned from my experience at an idealist.org-sponsored grad fair in Chicago just a few weeks ago, grad schools really seem to LOVE AmeriCorps members. First and foremost, the representatives from schools with whom I spoke were really impressed by some of the basic things I told them about our project. So many undergrads go right into grad school without much thought. When school reps can tell that you have taken the time to grow

professionally, it gives you a leg up on those without any experience. As much as we've been told that this would be an incentive for becoming a VISTA, I have to say I was still surprised at how well I was received at the fair.



In addition to this, I found that specific schools were extremely enthusiastic about encouraging former AmeriCorps members to apply to their programs.

Some schools stated that AmeriCorps alumni were always put first for financial aid or admissions considerations. Others offered up to six academic credits for past AmeriCorps experiences (Indiana University, Bloomington). One of the most enticing incentives, however, is that a number of US schools actually match our education awards of \$4,725

(http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/benefits/ed_award_match.asp)

. Please note that each school tends to administer this in a different way, so make sure to check with each school for more details.

Okay, so now you've got a list of schools that a) offer financial incentives, b) clearly value AmeriCorps alumni, and c) offer programs that complement some of the AmeriCorps values that we all have. It's only early November, so you should now have at least a few months to check out some of these amazing options before the application deadlines hit! Also, feel free to email me or Jim Handorf, my

comrade at the Chicago grad school fair, about any of the schools that sent representatives. Between the two of us, we have some great brochures and stories from the event!

VISTAs in the News



Josh Cowles and Sara Byrnes,
Fond du Lac Public Library

"Help for unemployed offered at Fond du Lac Public Library"

<http://www.fdlreporter.com/article/20090924/FON0101/909240362/1289/FON01/Help-for-unemployed-offered-at-Fond-du-Lac-Public-Library>

Nicole Stachurski,
Grove Elementary School
'14 Wisconsin Rapids Families Will Get Free Computers"

<http://www.wsaw.com/news/headlines/63189567.html>

Sylvia Sedrak,
Wausau Early Childhood Program
"West boys host youth soccer clinic"

<http://www.wausaudailyherald.com/article/20091002/WDH0101/910020590/1581&located=rss>

Anna Morgen and Casey Gauthier,
School District of Rhinelander
"VISTA members aid schools with literacy projects"

http://www.newsofthenorth.net/article/Community/Education/VISTA_members_aid_schools_with_literacy_projects/25976

Sara Hubin,
Lakeland Family Resource Center
"A Great Combination"

<http://wcregister.net/link.asp?smenu=74&detail=6661&wpage=1>

Recipe of the Month: Pigs in a Blanket

This month, Erica Spurgeon shares with us a recipe that is simple, quick, and works wonders after a long day of work!



Ingredients:

1 Package of hot dogs
1 package of Pillsbury crescent rolls
4 slices of cheese (optional)

Directions:

Cut each hot dog in half. Cut each section of crescent roll dough in half. Lay half a slice of cheese on each hot dog. Wrap crescent roll dough around each hot dog. Bake at 400 degrees for 6 to 10 minutes. Enjoy!

"Hey! That's a Good Idea!" Corner



Abby Churchill, VISTA at the South Madison Health and Family Center, created hand-made thank you cards for a group of volunteers that have kept the Reading in the Waiting Room program alive and thriving. Even a simple show of appreciation goes a long way. **VOLUNTEERING**

Sarah Glassman, VISTA at Maple Tree Elementary School, has been hard at work making connections with community groups (including a pastor at a local church) to recruit for her Action Team. Having a variety of

representatives is important to ensure that many perspectives and experiences contribute to solid partnerships. **DECISION MAKING**

Cara Slingerland, VISTA at the School for Urban Planning and Architecture, has consulted with an arborist (and friend!) about a tree planting activity with families at her school. It's a great idea to tap into friends, family, and anyone you know for favors and resources.

COLLABORATING

Mary Anne Simpson, VISTA at Winnefox Library System (Montello Public Library), has modified and circulated fliers all over Marquette County to help publicize her site's "Job search, job resume writing and skill development grant" workshops. She has also contacted businesses, the local technical college, and small manufacturing companies to find volunteers and to promote these services. **EMPLOYMENT and JOB SKILLS TRAINING**

Jane Parker and Heather Knops, VISTAs at Shiocton Public Library, have contacted a financial planner in their area to schedule a class at the library for those who are interested in learning strategies on budgeting and other issues pertaining to finances.

FINANCIAL PLANNING

Colleen Douglass, VISTA at Vaughn Public Library, spent some time at her local WIC office in September to get a variety of brochures and fliers that relate to nutrition and health. She also spoke with the nutritionist who will be an excellent resource/partner for the library and the Ashland community.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Grant Opportunities



College Board: Bob Costas Grants

Bob Costas Grants support exceptional teachers who through their innovative teaching methods motivate their students to write. Winning teachers are awarded grants to enhance successful projects currently under way. Projects can be carried out in school (public or nonpublic), through an after-school writing workshop, or during a summer program. Maximum award: \$2,000. Eligibility: Teachers from all academic disciplines grades 6-12.

Deadline: November 20, 2009.

<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/k-12>

SeaWorld/Busch Gardens Environmental Excellence Awards

The 2010 SeaWorld/Busch Gardens Environmental Excellence Awards recognize the outstanding efforts of students and teachers across the country who are working at the grassroots level to protect and preserve the environment. Since this is an awards -- not grant -- program, entrants must demonstrate significant accomplishments that have occurred prior to the submission deadline. Maximum

award: \$10,000. Eligibility: schools (grades K-12) and community groups.

Deadline: November 20, 2009.

<http://www.swbg-animals.org/conservation-matters/eea/about.htm>

**General Mills Foundation:
Champions for Healthy Kids**

The General Mills Foundation Champions for Healthy Kids grant program encourages communities in the United States to improve the eating and physical activity patterns of young people, ages 2-20. Grants will be awarded to nonprofit organizations and agencies working with communities that demonstrate the greatest need and likelihood of sustainable impact on young people's nutrition and activity levels through innovative programs. Maximum award: \$10,000. Eligibility: 501(c)3, community-based groups.

Deadline: January 15, 2010.

<http://www.generalmills.com/corporate/commitment/champions.aspx>

The Nat'l Endowment for the Humanities in cooperation with the American Library Association

is awarding a special collection of books and DVDs as part of its "We the People Bookshelf" project, to as many as 4,000 libraries. All public and school libraries are eligible for the award. The program is designed to encourage young people to read and understand great literature while exploring themes in American history. Libraries selected will be

required to use the bookshelf selections in programs for young readers in their communities. Program officials prefer online submissions.

Deadline: January 29, 2010.

<http://cdpublications.com/freenews/107>

AFN International: Young Eco-Hero Awards

Action for Nature International Young Eco-Hero Awards recognize the individual accomplishments of young people whose personal actions have significantly improved the environment. Maximum award: \$500. Eligibility: youth ages 8-16. Deadline:

February 28, 2010.

<http://www.actionfornature.org/eco-hero/ecoheroawards.html>

Governor's School Health Award

Governor Doyle and State Superintendent Evers support the Governor's School Health Award as a way to recognize and celebrate schools with policies, programs, and the infrastructure to support and promote healthy eating; physical activity; alcohol-, tobacco, and drug-free lifestyles; and parental and community involvement. The goal of this award is to motivate and empower Wisconsin schools as they create and maintain healthy school environments.

Deadline: March 19, 2010

<http://www.schoolhealthaward.wi.gov/>